

Our Man Hoppe

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The Soapiest Opera Around



Arthur Hoppe

A NUMBER of housewives around the country have phoned their local television stations to protest that their favorite soap operas have been pre-empted by the Watergate hearings.

Their trouble is they haven't been listening.

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GOOD MORNING housewives and other shut-ins. It's time for another daily chapter of "Return to Payoff Place" — the heartwarming story that reveals the most intimate secrets of the just plain folks who live in a typical Middle American community called "Whitehouse."

When we left them yesterday, Jim, the honest burglar who wants to go straight, was telling kindly old Sheriff Sam all about The Mysterious Phone Call.

Burglar Jim, as you remember, told Sheriff Sam that he had a Mysterious Phone Call from his old friend, Mr. Caulfield, who worked for Mayor Dick. Mayor Dick, Jim said, offered to spring him from the pen and give him a bundle of money if he promised not to rat on his old buddies. Otherwise, he'd have him rubbed out.

"But I'm a good American first and a burglar second," said Honest Jim forthrightly. "And therefore I decided to rat on my buddies."

Sheriff Sam, however, said he couldn't arrest Mayor Dick on hearsay evidence like that — 'specially when Mayor Dick denied the whole thing. But he promised to go right on gathering all the hearsay evidence Mayor Dick could deny.

Meanwhile, pipe-puffing old John and Maurice the Bagman denied arranging a love affair between Mayor Dick and a wealthy paramour for \$200,000. They said the paramour, who suddenly remembered an appointment in South America, wasn't trying to buy Mayor Dick's favors, but only wanted to contribute to good government. Either way, it looked like \$200,000

down the drain. Mayor Dick, however, denied it, one way or the other.

At the same time, John's Other Wife, Martha, who was or was not kidnaped, beaten and drugged, has been very quiet lately. This has given rise to vicious rumors she's suffered a breakdown. Or a breakup. Or acute laryngitis. In an oversight, Mayor Dick has not yet denied this.

On the other hand, former Police Chief Helms said he refused Mayor Dick's instructions to tell Efrem Zimbalist Jr. not to raid a Mexican laundry. He said he didn't know anything about Mexican laundries. Mayor Dick said he didn't either. He then removed Chief Helms from office and transferred him to the sticks.

For suspense, our romantic lead, that handsome young idol, John III, wants to tell all he knows, if anything, about all the guilty things he and everybody else did — if Sheriff Sam won't send him to jail because he's really innocent.

John III was fired by Mayor Dick after he denied writing a report Mayor Dick said he wrote. That was before Mayor Dick denied the whole thing.

Anyway, our scene today opens in a psychiatrist's office. Burglars have rifled the files searching for detailed revelations of a famous patient's most intimate sexual life. Mayor Dick, however, has denied any knowledge of such things.

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DO YOU SUFFER from dirty money? Are you tired of the inconvenience of sending it out to unreliable Mexican laundries? Use Coverup! — the miracle cleanser that removes all traces from your \$100 bills.

And, now, back to "Return to Payoff Place" and the hidden secrets of just plain folks. Unfortunately, however, our time has expired. So look in again tomorrow, friends. And meanwhile, stay tuned for "Truth or Consequences!"